

Christianity

Place founded:

Palestine

Founder:

Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish carpenter

Adherents:

2 billion {1}

US adherents:

159 million in 2001 {2}

UK adherents:

51 million in 1997 {3}

Size rank:

largest world religion

Main location:

Europe

North America

South America

Major sects (denominations):

Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant

Sacred texts:

The Bible, comprised of the Old Testament and New Testament

Original languages:

Aramaic, Greek, Latin

Religious professionals:

Priest; bishop; archbishop; patriarch; pope; pastor; minister; preacher; deacon

House of worship:

Church, chapel, cathedral, basilica, meeting hall

Type of theism:

Trinitarian Monotheism

Ultimate reality:

One God (a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit)

Human nature:

Created good but now born sinful

Purpose of life:

Know, love and serve God

How to live:

Have faith in the true God and Christ's resurrection, do good works, participate in sacraments

Afterlife:

Resurrection of body and soul, purgatory (Catholic and Orthodox), and eternal heaven or hell

Books: [REDACTED]: 66

Hinduism

It is difficult to assign a dogmatic orthodoxy to Hinduism. Many variations have developed from Hinduism over the years, and many non-Hindu cults and religious movements gained their inspiration from Hinduism. Even in India today, the most orthodox divisions of Hinduism have changed significantly over the last three thousand years.

One of the oldest aspects of Hinduism is as much social as religious, and that is the caste system. It is important to understand the caste system before delving into Hindu religious beliefs. According to Hindu teaching, there are four basic castes, or social classes. Each caste has its own rules and obligation for living. The elite caste is the Brahman, or priest caste. Second are the Kshatriyas, or warriors and rulers. Third are the Vaisyas, or merchants and farmers. Finally, the fourth caste is the Shudras, or laborers. Outside the caste system are the untouchables. The untouchables are the outcasts of Hindu society. Though outlawed in India in the 1940s, the untouchables are still a very real part of Indian society. One does not get decide his or her caste – that matter is decided when one is born into a particular caste.

As previously stated, there is not a strict orthodoxy in Hinduism. There are however, several principles that share a commonality among the various sects. Virtually all Hindus believe in:

- **The three-in-one god known as “Brahman,” which is composed of: Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Shiva (the Destroyer).**
- **The Caste System.**
- **Karma.** The law that good begets good, and bad begets bad. Every action, thought, or decision one makes has consequences – good or bad – that will return to each person in the present life, or in one yet to come.
- **Reincarnation.** Also known as “transmigration of souls,” or “samsara.” This is a journey on the “circle of life,” where each person experiences as series of physical births, deaths, and rebirths. With good karma, a person can be reborn into a higher caste, or even to godhood. Bad karma can relegate one to a lower caste, or even to life as an animal in their next life.
- **Nirvana.** This is the goal of the Hindu. Nirvana is the release of the soul from the seemingly endless cycle of rebirths.

Hinduism is both polytheistic, and pantheistic. There are three gods that compose Brahman – Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Hindus also worship the “wives” of Shiva, such as Kali, or one of Vishnu’s ten incarnations (avatars). This is only the beginning. There are literally millions of Hindu gods and goddesses – by some counts, as many as 330 million!

At the same time, Hinduism teaches that all living things are Brahman in their core. In other words, all living things are Brahman, or god. Enlightenment is attained by becoming tuned in to the Brahman within. Only then can one reach Nirvana. The release from the wheel of life that allows access to Nirvana is known as “moksha.”

Hindus recognize three possible paths to moksha, or salvation. The first is the way of works or *karma yoga*. This is a very popular way of salvation and lays emphasis on the idea that

liberation may be obtained by fulfilling one's familial and social duties thereby overcoming the weight of bad karma one has accrued.

The second way of salvation is the way of knowledge, or *jnana yoga*. The basic premise of the way of knowledge is that the cause of our bondage to the cycle of rebirths in this world is ignorance. According to the predominant view among those committed to this way, our ignorance consists of the mistaken belief that we are individual selves, and not one with the ultimate divine reality – Brahman. It is this same ignorance that gives rise to our bad actions, which result in bad karma. Salvation is achieved through attaining a state of consciousness in which we realize our identity with Brahman. This is achieved through deep meditation, often as a part of the discipline of yoga.

The third way of salvation is the way of devotion, or *bhakti yoga*. This is the way most favored by the common people of India. It satisfies the longing for a more emotional and personal approach to religion. It involves the self-surrender to one of the many personal gods and goddesses of Hinduism. Such devotion is expressed through acts of worship, temple rituals, and pilgrimages. Some Hindus conceive of ultimate salvation as absorption into the one divine reality, with all loss of individual existence. Others conceive of it as heavenly existence in adoration of the personal God.

BUDDHISM

Four Noble Truths

- 1. Life is suffering;*
- 2. Suffering is due to attachment;*
- 3. Attachment can be overcome;*
- 4. There is a path for accomplishing this.*

The Eightfold Path

- 1. **Right view** is the true understanding of the four noble truths.*
- 2. **Right aspiration** is the true desire to free oneself from attachment, ignorance, and hatefulness.*

These two are referred to as **prajña**, or wisdom.

- 3. **Right speech** involves abstaining from lying, gossiping, or hurtful talk.*
- 4. **Right action** involves abstaining from hurtful behaviors, such as killing, stealing, and careless sex.*
- 5. **Right livelihood** means making your living in such a way as to avoid dishonesty and hurting others, including animals.*

These three are referred to as **shila**, or morality.

- 6. **Right effort** is a matter of exerting oneself in regards to the content of one's mind: Bad qualities should be abandoned and prevented from arising again; Good qualities should be enacted and nurtured.*
- 7. **Right mindfulness** is the focusing of one's attention on one's body, feelings, thoughts, and consciousness in such a way as to overcome craving, hatred, and ignorance.*
- 8. **Right concentration** is meditating in such a way as to progressively realize a true understanding of imperfection, impermanence, and non-separateness.*

The last three are known as **samadhi**, or meditation.

Judaism

Judaism is a monotheistic religion which believes that the world was created by a single, all-knowing divinity, and that all things within that world were designed to have meaning and purpose as part of a divine order. According to the teachings of Judaism, God's will for human behavior was revealed to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Saini. The Torah, or commandments, which regulate how humans are to live their lives, were a gift from God so that they might live in according to His will.

Statement of Faith

Moses Maimonides, a Spanish Jew who lived in the 12th century, tried to condense the basic beliefs of Judaism into the form of a creed. It is still followed by the traditional forms of Judaism.

1. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is the Creator and Guide of everything that has been created; He alone has made, does make, and will make all things.
2. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is One, and that there is no unity in any manner like unto His, and that He alone is our God, who was, and is, and will be.
3. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is not a body, and that He is free from all the properties of matter, and that He has not any form whatever.
4. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is the first and the last.
5. I believe with perfect faith that to the Creator, blessed be His Name, and to Him alone, it is right to pray, and that it is not right to pray to any being besides Him.
6. I believe with perfect faith that all the works of the prophets are true.
7. I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses, our teacher, peace be unto him, was true, and that he was the chief of the prophets, both of those who preceded and of those who followed him.
8. I believe with perfect faith that the whole Torah, now in our possession, is the same that was given to Moses, our teacher, peace be unto him.

9. I believe with perfect faith that this Torah will not be changed, and that there will never be any other Law from the Creator, blessed be His name.

10. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, knows every deed of the children of men, and all their thoughts, as it is said. It is He that fashioned the hearts of them all, that gives heed to all their works.

11. I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, rewards those that keep His commandments and punishes those that transgress them.

12. I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and, though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming.

13. I believe with perfect faith that there will be a revival of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator, blessed and exalted be His name for ever and ever.

Three Branches of Judaism

These are the three branches of Judaism which form the framework for the type of lifestyle and beliefs of Jewish individuals:

Orthodox-

Traditionalists who observe most of the traditional dietary and ceremonial laws of Judaism

Conservative-

Do not hold to the importance of a Jewish political state, but put more emphasis on the historic and religious aspects of Judaism, doctrinally somewhere between Orthodox and Reform

Reform-

The liberal wing of Judaism, culture and race oriented with little consensus on doctrinal or religious belief

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/religion/judaism/beliefs.html>